

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 IO-13 ISO-00 AGRE-00 AID-05 CEA-01 CIAE-00
COME-00 EB-08 FRB-03 INR-07 NSAE-00 SP-02 STR-06
TRSE-00 LAB-04 SIL-01 OMB-01 /064 W
-----091913 210201Z /64

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: EAGR - EEC
SUBJ: ASSESSMENT OF COMMISSION'S 1978/79 PRICE PACKAGE AND
PROPOSALS FOR THE REFORM OF MEDITERRANEAN AGRICULTURE

REFS: A. 77 BRUSSELS 17856; B. 77 BRUSSELS 18330;
1. SUMMARY: THE MISSION BELIEVES THAT THE COMMISSION'S PROPOSED
1978/79 PRICE PACKAGE AND ITS MEDITERRANEAN PACKAGE, WITH THEIR
EMPHASIS ON PRICE RESTRAINT AND THEIR GENERAL AVOIDANCE OF
TRADE RESTRICTIVE MEASURES, ARE BASICALLY FAVORABLE TO US-EC
RELATIONS IN AGRICULTURE. ALTHOUGH SOME ELEMENTS OF THE PACKAGE
COULD POSE PROBLEMS FOR US, WE DO NOT EXPECT THEIR EFFECTS
TO BE MAJOR. MISSION NOTES A TENDENCY TOWARDS INCREASED USE
OF DOMESTIC SUBSIDIES AS AN EC POLICY TOOL WHICH COULD HAVE
FAVORABLE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF EC
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POLICY. WE URGE THAT OUR REACTION TO THESE SUBSIDIES BE
PRIMARILY BASED ON REALISTIC ESTIMATES OF ADVERSE TRADE EFFECTS
RATHER THAN MERELY ON PRINCIPLE. AT THE SAME TIME, MISSION
BELIEVES WE SHOULD CONTINUE TO APPLY PRESSURE AGAINST ANY EC
PROPOSALS WHICH WOULD CREATE MORE RESTRICTIVE TREATMENT FOR
US AGRICULTURAL EXPORTS. END SUMMARY.

2. THE COMMISSION'S 1978/79 PRICE PACKAGE AND ITS PACKAGE FOR THE REFORM OF MEDITERRANEAN AGRICULTURE WERE DESCRIBED IN REFS. A, B, C, G AND H. THIS CABLE ASSESSES THESE PROPOSALS WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO US/EC RELATIONS IN THE AGRICULTURAL SPHERE.

3. THE 1978/79 PRICE PACKAGE IS NOTEWORTHY FOR ITS OVERWHELMING PHASIS ON PRICE RESTRAINT. THE OVERALL 2 PERCENT INCREASE PROPOSED (3 PERCENT IF CHANGES IN MCA'S ARE INCLUDED) IS WELL BELOW THE RATE OF INFLATION AND EVEN BELOW THE COMMISSION'S OWN CALCULATION OF THE PERCENTAGE INCREASE (4.2 PERCENT) NEEDED TO MAINTAIN PARITY BETWEEN MODERN EC FARMS AND THE NON-FARM SECTOR. THE LOW LEVEL OF THE PROPOSED INCREASE REFLECTS THE CHANGES IN THE EC POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CLIMATE THAT HAVE TAKEN PLACE IN RECENT YEARS. MEMBER STATE GOVERNMENTS HAVE BECOME INCREASINGLY CONCERNED WITH THE BUDGETARY AND INFLATIONARY IMPACT OF FARM PRICE DECISIONS. FURTHERMORE, THERE HAS BEEN A GROWING RECOGNITION THAT THE FARM INCOME PROBLEM CANNOT BE DEALT WITH SOLELY THROUGH THE PRICE MECHANISM. IT ALSO STRONGLY REFLECTS THE INFLUENCE OF COMMISSIONER GUNDELACH, WHO HAS MADE IT KNOWN ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS THAT HE REGARDS EC FARM PRICES AS TOO HIGH. GUNDELACH'S PRESCRIPTION FOR THE SICK STATE OF EC AGRICULTURAL AFFAIRS IS STEADILY APPLIED DOSES OF RESTRAINT IN PRICE-SETTING COMBINED WITH PRAGMATIC, UNSPECTACULAR IMPROVEMENTS IN EXISTING POLICIES.

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4. IN LINE WITH THIS APPROACH, THE PRICE PACKAGE IS ALSO CHARACTERIZED BY A LACK OF MAJOR POLICY INITIATIVES. WITH A FEW EXCEPTIONS, THE COMMISSION HAS RESTRICTED ITSELF TO TIGHTENING UP OR STRENGTHENING EXISTING EC PROGRAMS. AS REPORTED IN REF. A, THIS REFLECTS THE INTENTION OF COMMISSIONER GUNDELACH PUT THE FOCUS OF THE PRICE NEGOTIATIONS ON THE PRICES THEMSELVES RATHER THAN ON OTHER POLICY PALLIATIVES FOR THE EC'S AGRICULTURAL PROBLEMS. FROM THE US POINT OF VIEW IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT THE COMMISSION'S PACKAGE ALSO AVOIDS WITH MINOR EXCEPTIONS PROPOSALS OF A TRADE RESTRICTIVE NATURE. NOR HAS IT DREDGED UP OLD SCAPEGOATS SUCH AS THE VEGETABLE OIL TAX AIMED AT FOCUSING THE BLAME FOR EC FARM PROBLEMS ON THIRD COUNTRIES. WHERE THE COMMISSION HAS PRESENTED NEW INITIATIVES, THESE HAVE FOR THE MOST PART INVOLVED DOMESTIC SUBSIDIES RATHER THAN PRICE SUPPORT OR TRADE.

5. THERE ARE A FEW ASPECTS OF THE PRICE PACKAGE WHICH COULD CREATE PROBLEMS FOR THE US - FOR EXAMPLE, OBLIGATORY REGISTRATION OF MULTIPLICATION CONTRACTS FOR SEEDS AND THE POSSIBILITY OF A SECURITY DEPOSIT REQUIREMENT FOR FIELD PEAS

AND BEANS. (REFS. I AND J). ALSO IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT THE NEW SUBSIDY PROGRAMS FOR FIELD PEAS AND BEANS AND DRIED FORAGE PRODUCTS COULD, IF SUCCESSFUL, MAKE INROADS INTO THE MARKETS FOR US PROTEIN FEEDS. (ALTHOUGH WE NOTE THAT VARIOUS EC EFFORTS DEVELOP PRODUCTION OF FIELD PEAS AND BEANS IN RECENT YEARS DO NOT APPEAR TO HAVE HAD MUCH EFFECT.) HOWEVER, WE WOULD EXPECT THAT THE TRADE EFFECTS OF THE ABOVE MEASURES WOULD BE MINOR. OVERALL, THE PROPOSED 18/79 PRICE PACKAGE SHOULD BE REGARDED AS FAVORABLE TO US-EC RELATIONS IN THE AGRICULTURAL SPHERE -- FIRST OF ALL, BECAUSE ITS PHASIS ON PRICE RESTRAINT IS COMPATIBLE WITH THE LONG-RUN US GOAL OF BRINGING EC PRICES CLOSER TO WORLD

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PRICE LEVELS AND, ULTIMATELY, REDUCING EC IMPORT PROTECTION A DISRUPTION OF WORLD COMMODITY MARKETS; AND, SECONDLY, BECAUSE IT AVOIDS TRYING TO SOLVE EC FARM PROBLEMS AT THE EXPENSE OF THIRD COUNTRIES.

6. THERE REMAINS, OF COURSE, A BIG QUESTION AS TO WHETHER THE COMMISSION'S MODEST, PRICE-ORIENTED APPROACH WILL BE SUFFICIENT TO BRING ABOUT AN IMPROVEMENT, OR PREVENT A FURTHER DETERIORATION, OF THE EC AGRICULTURAL SITUATION -- PARTICULARLY, SURPLUS PROBLEMS IN THE DAIRY AND SUGAR SECTORS. COMMISSIONER GUNDELACH APPARENTLY THINKS IT WILL, BUT MANY OF OUR CONTACTS IN THE COMMISSION AND MEMBER STATE DELEGATIONS ARE SKEPTICAL. IN ANY CASE, IT IS VERY DOUBTFUL THAT A MORE STRENUOUS OR INNOVATIVE LINE OF ATTACK WOULD HAVE ANY CHANCE OF SUCCESS GIVEN THE EC'S TORTUOUS

DECISION MAKING PROCESS.

7. THE COMMISSION'S PACKAGE FOR REFORM OF MEDITERRANEAN AGRICULTURE PARALLELS THE PRICE PACKAGE IN THAT IT TOO LARGELY AVOIDS PROPOSALS WHICH WOULD RAISE BARRIERS TO IMPORTS AND MEASURES WHICH WOULD RAISE EC PRICES. THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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COMMISSION'S PROPOSAL SHOULD BE VIEWED IN THE LIGHT OF EARLIER FRENCH, AND TO A LESSER EXTENT, ITALIAN REQUESTS FOR A REVISION OF THE VARIOUS CAPS APPLYING TO MEDITERRANEAN PRODUCTS, SO AS TO STRENGTHEN "COMMUNITY PREFERENCE" OVER IMPORTED PRODUCTS AS WELL AS THE INTERVENTION SYSTEM. (REFS. E AND F). THE FRENCH REQUESTED THE REPLACEMENT OF THE EXISTING REFERENCE PRICE SYSTEM FOR FRESH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES BY A THRESHOLD PRICE SYSTEM AND THE IMPROVEMENT OF MINIMUM IMPORT PRICE AND SAFEGUARD MECHANISMS FOR PROCESSED FRUITS AND VEGETABLES. THE EMPHASIS OF THE COMMISSION'S MEDITERRANEAN PACKAGE IS INSTEAD ON NEW OR INCREASED DOMESTIC SUBSIDIES, STRUCTURAL MEASURES, AND THE STRENGTHENING OF PRODUCER GROUPS.

8. AS IN THE CASE OF THE PRICE PACKAGE, THERE ARE SOME FEATURES OF THE MEDITERRANEAN PACKAGE WHICH COULD ADVERSELY AFFECT US TRADE. MOST IMPORTANTLY, THE COMMISSION'S PROPOSAL TO INTRODUCE PROCESSING SUBSIDIES FOR TOMATOES, PEACHES, PRUNES AND APRICOTS (REF. D), COULD REDUCE EC MARKET POSSIBILITIES FOR THESE PRODUCTS FOR THIRD COUNTRY EXPORTERS, INCLUDING THE U.S. THE COMMISSION HAS ALSO PROPOSED SOME CHANGES IN THE REFERENCE PRICE SYSTEM WHICH COULD RESULT IN HIGHER REFERENCE PRICES THAN UNDER THE EXISTING SYSTEM. THIS TOO COULD POSE A PROBLEM ALTHOUGH IN THE PAST US PRODUCTS HAVE GENERALLY ENTERED WELL ABOVE THE REFERENCE PRICE. THE COMMISSION'S PROPOSAL PAY MARKETING SUBSIDIES FOR OLIVE OIL SHOULD INCREASE ITS PRICE COMPETITIVENESS WITH VEGETABLE OIL PRODUCTS. HOWEVER, SINCE IT IS PROPOSED AT PRODUCER SUBSIDIES FOR OLIVE OIL BE LIMITED TO EXISTING TREES, NO EXPANSION IN OLIVE OIL PRODUCTION SHOULD RESULT FROM THIS PROGRAM. THE PROPOSED SUBSIDY PROGRAM FOR FIELD PEAS AND BEANS, PREVIOUSLY MENTIONED IN RA 4 AS PART OF THE PRICE PACKAGE, IS ALSO LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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LISTED AS AN ELEMENT OF THE MEDITERRANEAN REFORM PACKAGE.

9. WITH THE POSSIBLE EXCEPTION OF THE PROPOSED PROCESSING

SUBSIDIES, THESE ELEMENTS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN REFORM PACKAGE DO NOT APPEAR LIKELY TO HAVE A SIGNIFICANT EFFECT ON US TRADE. THEY ARE NOT SUFFICIENT TO OFFSET THE OVERALL FAVORABLE DIRECTION THE COMMISSION HAS TAKEN IN THIS AREA. ALSO, WE REGARD THE COMMISSION'S PROPOSAL TO ABOLISH THE MIP SYSTEM FOR TOMATO CONCENTRATE (WHICH FORMS PART OF THE PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH PROCESSING SUBSIDIES -- REF. D) AS A SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT. IT COULD SIGNAL FURTHER COMMISSION ATTEMPTS TO SUBSTITUTE SUBSIDIES FOR PRICE SUPPORT OR IMPORT RESTRICTIVE MEASURES.

10. IN EVALUATING THE COMMISSION'S PERFORMANCE IN DEVELOPING THE PRICE AND MEDITERRANEAN PACKAGES, WE SHOULD ALSO POINT OUT THAT SEVERAL PROPOSALS OF A TRADE RESTRICTIVE NATURE, WHICH HAD BEEN INSERTED BY WORKING-LEVEL OFFICIALS IN THE PACKAGE, WERE REMOVED BY HIGH LEVEL COMMISSION OFFICIALS. FOR EXAMPLE, COMMISSION OFFICIALS HAVE CONFIDENTIALLY TOLD US THAT AT ONE TIME A LICENSING SYSTEM FOR DEHYDRATED FORAGE HAD BEEN INCLUDED IN THE PACKAGE. MOREOVER, AS NOTED IN REF. D, IT APPEARS THAT AT ONE POINT THE PROPOSAL FOR PROCESSING SUBSIDIES IN THE MEDITERRANEAN REFORM PACKAGE INCLUDED PROVISIONS CONCERNING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF FLOOR PRICES.

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11. THE MEDITERRANEAN AND PRICE PACKAGES PROPOSED BY THE COMMISSION UNDERLINE THE TENDENCY TO MAKE USE OF DOMESTIC SUBSIDIES RATHER THAN PRICE OR IMPORT RESTRICTIVE MEASURES TO DEAL WITH AGRICULTURAL MARKET PROBLEMS THAT HAS BEEN EVIDENT IN EC AGRICULTURAL POLICY IN RECENT YEARS. (A RELATED TENDENCY HAS BEEN TO SHIFT FROM EXPORT TO DOMESTIC SUBSIDY PROGRAMS IN SURPLUS DISPOSAL.) THE PROLIFERATION OR STRENGTHENING OF EC SUBSIDY PROGRAMS IN AGRICULTURE COULD POSE CERTAIN DANGERS FOR US AGRICULTURAL TRADE; OBVIOUSLY, THESE SUBSIDIES SERVE TO REDUCE THE COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE OF THE US AND OTHER THIRD COUNTRY SUPPLIERS. HOWEVER, THERE ARE A NUMBER OF SPECIAL FACTORS THAT SHOULD BE TAKEN INTO CONSIDERATION IN APPROACHING THIS ISSUE;

A. DOMESTIC SUBSIDY PROGRAMS WOULD TEND TO ENCOURAGE CON-
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SUMPTION AND THUS AVOID THE ADVERSE EFFECTS OF PRICE ON CON-
SUMPTION THAT PRESENTLY CHARACTERIZE OTHER EC AGRICULTURAL POLI-
CIES.

B. AS NOTED EARLIER, WITH REGARD TO THE MIP FOR TOMATO CONCENTRATE, SUBSIDIES MIGHT BE USED BY THE COMMISSION REMOVE OR REDUCE IMPORT BARRIERS. SOME COMMISSION OFFICIALS HINT THAT IF THEY CAN AVOID PRESSURES FOR MAKING MEDITERRANEAN AGRICULTURAL POLICY MORE PRICE RIGID AND IMPORT RESTRICTIVE, THEY CAN PERHAPS TURN AROUND THE ARGUMENT THAT THERE IS AN IMBALANCE IN SUPPORT AS BETWEEN MEDITERRANEAN AND NORTHERN AGRICULTURE, AND LOOSEN THE CAP'S FOR NORTHERN AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS.

C. PAST PERIENCE SUGGESTS AT SUBSIDIES ARE NOT LIKELY TO PROVIDE AN IMPORTANT STIMULUS GREATER EC PRODUCTION, PARTICULARLY IN ITALY. IN PART, THIS IS BECAUSE THE COST OF SUBSIDY PROGRAMS IS MORE VISIBLE THAN THAT OF PRICE SUPPORT PROGRAMS AND THUS MORE SUBJECT TO PUBLIC SCRUTINY; IN PART, BECAUSE SOME OF THE SECTORS ON WHICH SUBSIDIES HAVE BEEN LAVISHED HAVE BEEN BACKWARD AND NOT MARKET ORIENTED. (THERE HAVE BEEN, HOWEVER, SOME IMPORTANT EXCEPTIONS THIS GENERALIZATION E.G., DURUM WHEAT AND HOPS).

D. IT WOULD ALSO APPEAR TO BE EASIER FOR THE COMMISSION TO ADJUST SUBSIDIES (THAN PRICE SUPPORT MEASURES) WHERE SUCH PROGRAMS CAUSE SURPLUS DISPOSAL OR OTHER DIFFICULTIES. THE COMMISSION HAS DEMONSTRATED WILLINGNESS TO CUTBACK ON SUBSIDY PROGRAMS WHERE THESE HAVE NOT WORKED WELL OR ARE DEEMED UNNECESSARY (E.G. ITS EFFORTS TO RESTRICT ELIGIBILITY

FOR DURUM WHEAT PRODUCER SUBSIDIES, THE PROPOSAL TO ELIMINATE
THE LEMON MARKETING PREMIUMS.)

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E. SUBSIDIES OF THE TYPE PROPOSED IN BOTH THE PRICE AND
MEDITERRANEAN PACKAGE, MAY BE NEEDED BY THE COMMISSION --
AS "PAYOFFS" TO ITALY -- IF WE ARE TO SPRING LOOSE SOME
OF THE CONCESSIONS ON, FOR EXAMPLE, CITRUS, TOBACCO, AND
PROCESSED FRUITS AT WE ARE SEEKING IN THE MTN.

F. FINALLY, IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT THE LEGAL, GATT
BASIS FOR COMPLAINTS INVOLVING DOMESTIC SUBSIDIES IS NOT
VERY STRONG.

12. IN VIEW OF THESE FACTORS, WE FEEL THAT A CAREFUL APPROACH
IS NEEDED IN DEALING WITH DOMESTIC SUBSIDIES IN EC AGRICULTURE.
WHILE WE DO NOT FEEL THAT POTENTIAL PROBLEMS SHOULD BE IGNORED,
WE URGE AT ANY COMPLAINTS OR REPRESENTATION BY THE US CON-
CERNING THESE SUBSIDY PROGRAMS SHOULD BE BASED PRIMARILY ON
REALISTIC ESTIMATES OF THEIR ADVERSE EFFECTS ON US TRADE OR
THE POTENTIAL FOR TRADE GROWTH RATHER THAN MERELY ON QUES-
TIONS OF PRINCIPLE. TO THIS END, WE WOULD WELCOME FROM
ADDRESSEE POSTS THEIR EVALUATIONS, WHERE APPROPRIATE, OF THE
TRADE EFFECTS OF PROPOSED OR EXISTING EC SUBSIDY PROGRAMS.

13. AT THE SAME TIME WE FEEL THAT THE USG SHOULD CONTINUE
TO APPLY PRESSURE WHEREVER IT APPEARS THAT EC ACTIONS WOULD
CREATE MORE RESTRICTIVE TREATMENT FOR AGRICULTURAL IMPORTS.
MISSION AND ADDRESSEE POSTS NEED ESPECIALLY TO BE ON GUARD
THAT NEW ELEMENTS OF A RESTRICTIVE NATURE ARE NOT INTRO-
DUCED INTO THE PRICE OR MEDITERRANEAN PACKAGE DURING THE
COUNCIL DELIBERATIONS. AS NOTED IN REF. A., GUNDELACH'S
BASIC STYLE IS TO PRESENT A STREAMLINED PACKAGE PERMITTING
THE MEMBER STATES CONSIDERABLE INITIATIVE IN SHAPING THE
FINAL DECISIONS. HINTON

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: AGRICULTURE, PRICES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 20 jan 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978BRUSSE01274
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780031-0890
Format: TEL
From: BRUSSELS USEEC
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780142/aaaabizj.tel
Line Count: 371
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: fc27c7e1-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 7
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 BRUSSELS 17856, 77 BRUSSELS 18330
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 05 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: N/A
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3743370
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ASSESSMENT OF COMMISSION'S 1978/79 PRICE PACKAGE AND PROPOSALS FOR THE REFORM OF MEDITERRANEAN AGRICULTURE
TAGS: EAGR, EEC
To: STATE USOECD MULTIPLE
Type: TE
vdkgvkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/fc27c7e1-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
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Declassified/Released
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EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014